

**Daniel Scarpinato**  
[Arizona Capitol Times](#)

When Arizonans rang in the new millennium back in 2000, most knew next to nothing about a woman named Janet Napolitano.

And while John McCain wasn't new to anyone in the Grand Canyon state, the rest of the country was just beginning to meet him.

Republicans had a firm lock on five of the state's six congressional seats, and even some of the most conservative politicians in the state didn't devote much breath to the immigration issue.

ASU was known more for its parties than its curriculum. And blogs - well, we were just learning how to use e-mail.

In 10 years - due to raging growth, the rise of technology and a changing political climate - Arizona has gone through a gargantuan transformation.

That change wouldn't have been accomplished, however, without some strong personalities - Arizonans who, quite simply, defined the 2000s. Through brains, timing and sheer force of personality, a select few - some out-front, others behind the scenes - shaped the decade in politics.

Janet Napolitano, governor 2003-2009

Napolitano's full impact may not have been realized until she resigned as governor this year. Her defiant approach to budget negotiations. Her constant vetoes of Republican policies. Considered smart and tough as nails by both her allies and enemies, Napolitano's no-nonsense attitude to policy-making led the state through most of the 2000s.

Thanks to a booming economy, Napolitano won praise as one of the top governors in the country. The successes paid off at the ballot box, and it eventually fueled her career ambitions.

While state Democrats doubted she would ever leave the state under GOP control, she did.

Napolitano's poll numbers have plummeted since she left for the Obama administration, but the book may not be closed on her legacy. She hasn't ruled out another run for office, and she left the door open for a bid here by never changing her voter registration.

John McCain, senior senator

Arizona's senior senator made two bids for president in the 2000s. First, he challenged George W. Bush, a move that pushed him into the national limelight and had Time magazine calling his movement the "McCain Mutiny."

Most assumed his chances at the White House were over after that loss, but McCain spent the better part of the 2000s prepping for a run in 2008. The first Arizonan to carry a national ticket since Barry Goldwater (he actually holds Goldwater's seat), McCain made clear days after his loss to Barack Obama that he would be seeking to stay in the Senate.

Now he faces a potential primary challenge. Still, McCain seems determined to stay in politics for as long as Arizonans will allow him.

Cathy Herrod, activist

As leader of the social conservative Center for Arizona Policy, Herrod has successfully shaped state policy on some of the most divisive issues of the last decade. Whether it was her efforts to restrict abortion or the successful ballot measure in 2008 defining marriage between a man and a woman, Herrod has tirelessly led the fight.

Sometimes her tactics have come under scrutiny. After an emotional meltdown in the state Senate over sending the marriage measure to the ballot, then-Senate President Tim Bee openly criticized Herrod and her group for threatening lawmakers and coercing them to support the referral.

But Herrod has defended her approach, saying her group has given Arizonans the chance to write the rules on moral issues before the courts do it for them.

Harry Mitchell, congressman

In early 2006, Republican congressman J.D. Hayworth was considered unbeatable. His Phoenix-area district was heavily Republican and the colorful, anti-illegal-immigration reputation he crafted was viewed as Teflon. But a challenge from Harry Mitchell, an unassuming history teacher and former Tempe mayor, had Hayworth dancing.

Mitchell managed to win, turning Arizona's 5th Congressional District to blue from red. A Blue Dog, Mitchell often sides with Republicans on spending issues. And his support among Republicans and independents may be at risk next year in an environment in which the GOP will have an upper hand.

Still, most expect Mitchell to prevail. But if and when he retires, Democrats are unlikely to find anyone else with Mitchell's non-partisan aura who can carry the district.

Russell Pearce, state senator

Before the economy went south, immigration was the hottest political issue in Arizona politics. And Sen. Russell Pearce was the architect of a slew of immigration policies. Some made it into

law, others fell victim to Napolitano's veto stamp and many more passed via the ballot box.

Pearce's signature legislative policy was the state's employer-sanctions act - considered the toughest in the nation when Napolitano agreed to sign it in 2007. And he's the one who drafted Proposition 200, the measure that passed in 2004 to limit public benefits to illegal immigration.

That effort opened the floodgates for similar policies and forced other Arizona politicians, who had danced around the issue, to take a hardliner approach. And it has led to similar anti-illegal-immigration measures in other states.

Jim Pederson, developer

Most Arizonans know him as the guy who lost a race against Sen. Jon Kyl in 2006. But long before that, this wealthy shopping-mall developer and Casa Grande native had his fingerprints - and checkbook - on a host of important Democratic causes.

As chairman of the Arizona Democratic Party, Pederson's money and influence rebuilt the organization in the 2000s - helping to launch Gov. Janet Napolitano and Attorney General Terry Goddard into statewide office.

His sway didn't stop there. Pederson helped fund the campaign to form the state's publicly-funded Clean Elections program, which revolutionized Arizona elections - a move Pederson now says he regrets.

While Pederson has opted to stay out of the race for governor in 2010, his involvement in the Democratic Party and Arizona politics isn't expected to wane. He's been at the forefront of efforts to reform the way the Arizona draws legislative and congressional districts - a move that could alter the balance of power in this growing state.

Michael Crow, ASU president

Blunt and sometimes controversial, Crow's style of leadership has inspired fans and foes. But whichever side you are on, his vision of a mega, first-class university shaped the direction of Arizona State University this decade.

The goal: Transform ASU into the Harvard of the West and erase its party-school reputation. On his watch, the university expanded into downtown Phoenix, a cornerstone of urban renewal efforts there.

Critics say Crow wants too much, too fast. Legislators, in particular, point to rising tuition and shiny new buildings in the face of a struggling economy. But Crow has maintained that any cuts to Arizona's vulnerable university system could threaten the rise of ASU as a force to be reckoned with.

Greg Patterson, blogger/attorney

It's hard to remember a time when "blog" wasn't a household word, but when Greg Patterson, a former Arizona lawmaker, went live with something called "Espresso Pundit" back in 2004, the concept was infantile.

Calling himself an "over-caffeinated political junkie," the conservative used the platform to speak his mind - and often to criticize the mainstream media for its business and news decisions.

Soon the political world took note. Patterson inspired dozens of amateur Arizona pundits from across the political spectrum. More than any other blogger in the state, his posts have prompted news coverage in traditional outlets and shaped Arizona politics - from fueling concerns over messages on the state's 9-11 memorial to, most recently, opining on "Climategate" connections at the University of Arizona.

As the newspaper industry watches circulation and profits plummet, Patterson's writing arguably has more influence in the Republican-controlled Legislature than the editorial pages of the state's two largest daily newspapers.

Jim Kolbe, former congressman

For most of the decade, Kolbe was Arizona's longest serving members of Congress, using his tenure to wield influence while Republicans were in power. The centrist also held onto a marginal Republican district - Arizona's most competitive - election after election.

Notably, Kolbe was the only openly gay Republican in Congress before retiring in 2006. When Kolbe finally did announce he was stepping down, he set off a highly-competitive quest for his congressional seat, which eventually led to the election of Democrat Gabrielle Giffords.

Still highly popular in Tucson, Kolbe's political influence didn't sunset when he left Congress. In fact, he was said to be Napolitano's top pick to replace McCain if the presidential election had turned out differently.

Joe Arpaio, Maricopa County sheriff

No other Arizonan has developed a legion of followers and enemies anywhere near that of "America's Toughest Sheriff." The 2000s saw Sheriff Joe, as he's known, landing in controversy after controversy. His tactics and legal arguments, especially with regard to immigration roundups, have drawn increased scrutiny, especially on the federal level.

When he speaks, scores of protestors follow. But voters don't seem to mind, re-electing Arpaio in 2000, 2004 and 2008 by double-digit margins. Now polls show him in a strong position to run for governor, a prospect thought to be unlikely for the 77-year-old.

While his reputation is clearly based on his efforts on the immigration issue, Arpaio's dead-beat-dad roundups and mall patrols have allowed him to craft a populist image and stay in office for the past 17 years.